



Department of Business and Management

Master's in Management

Chair of Organizational Design

**“The impact of different rewards
mechanisms on job satisfaction and the
role of perceived organizational politics:
a quantitative study”**

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1. Introduction

In today's dynamic and complex work environments, organizations face a crucial challenge: how to motivate employees and retain their best talents (Rahaman et al., 2020). Job satisfaction has emerged as a critical factor to guarantee high levels of employee engagement and motivation, contributing to lowered absenteeism and turnover, ultimately enhancing overall organizational productivity and reputation (Rana and Singh, 2024; Baxi and Atre, 2024). Rewards systems, which may take the form of financial incentives -like salary or bonuses- or non-financial rewards, including feedback or recognition, are key levers available for employers to influence employees' attitudes and behaviors. These mechanisms are intentionally tailored by organizations to shape employees' attitudes towards their job (Chiang and Birtch, 2012), with the goal of boosting their performance, commitment, and engagement (Williams et al., 2006; Waqas and Saleem, 2014).

However, the effectiveness of rewards can be influenced by the organizational context in which these rewards are delivered. Specifically, the perception of organizational politics, which refers to employees' belief that individuals engage in self-serving behaviors to achieve personal interests at the expense of colleagues or organizational goals, can significantly alter how rewards are received. In such environments, the motivational power of rewards mechanisms can be undermined, leading to lowered job satisfaction.

This study investigates the influence of financial and non-financial reward systems on job satisfaction, with a particular focus on perceived organizational politics as a moderating factor in these relationships. The central research question is: *How do financial and non-financial rewards systems influence job satisfaction and how much this relationship is moderated by perceived organizational politics?*

By examining both the direct effects of reward mechanisms and the contextual impact of political perceptions within organizations, the research aims to offer a deeper and more nuanced understanding of what shapes employee satisfaction in complex organizational settings and to contribute to the wider narrative of the reward management, which is a crucial activity in the field of the human resource management (De Gieter and Hofmans, 2015).

The study reveals that both financial and non-financial incentives significantly influence job satisfaction of employees, emphasizing the importance of an integrated approach for organizations when rewarding their workforce. Notably, non-financial rewards effect on job satisfaction proves

greater compared to financial incentives, highlighting the importance of investing in building relational capital between managers and employees to foster a more satisfied workforce.

Despite not having an influence on the association between rewards and job satisfaction, the perception of political behaviors inside organizations is found to exert a direct negative effect on job satisfaction, suggesting that organizations should minimize such behaviors within the workplace to maintain their employees satisfied.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction (JS) has been widely studied in the academic field due to its relevance for the organizations, and the literature showed several definitions and facets of this topic (Zhu, 2012). One of the first definitions of job satisfaction was given by Fisher and Hanna (1931), that initially described it as a product of non-regulatory mood tendency. Hoppock (1935) stated that job satisfaction is the result of a combination of psychological, physiological and environmental factors that make people appreciate their job. Many studies analyzed job satisfaction focusing on the employee perception. Vroom (1964) defined it as a set of orientations that employees have towards their roles, while Locke (1969, p. 316) stated that job satisfaction is a *“function of the perceived relationship between what one wants from one's job and what one perceives it as offering or entailing”*, thus describing an appraisal process made by three moments: the perception of some aspects of the job, a value standard and the assessment of the relationship between the perception and the value, which operates as a benchmark. Similarly, Mishra (2013) referred to the concept of job satisfaction focusing on the fit between wants and expectations of employees regarding how they see their job. These definitions describe JS only from a single perspective, considering the affective dimension of the phenomenon. However, another line of the research concentrates on a multiple perspective vision of job satisfaction (Zhu, 2012). Organ and Near (1985) acknowledged that job satisfaction can be understood from an affective perspective or from a cognitive one. Similarly, in 1993 Moorman highlighted two different JS components: affective and cognitive satisfaction. The former refers to the emotional response one has toward their job (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996), focusing on whether the work environment generates positive emotions (Zhu, 2012) and emphasizing how an employee feels while on the job with affective-oriented assessments often asking about the individual's mood and emotional state during work (Moorman, 1993). In contrast, cognitive satisfaction involves a more analytical assessment of the job (Wagner, 2017), based on objective

factors rather than emotions, which arises from a logical evaluation of job conditions, opportunities, or outcomes compared to some set of standards (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996) and it's measured through questions that focus on the job's characteristics such as working conditions and the extent to which the job meets important personal needs (Moorman 1993). Brief and Roberson (2006) defined JS as an internal state, expressed through either affection or cognition, that reflects how much a person likes or dislikes their job, as well as the intensity of those feelings, and posed a strong paradox, affirming that in the academic field JS always held an affective meaning but its measurement instruments mainly focused on the cognition component. The Brief paradox is in line with the analysis of Organ and Near (1985) which stated that job satisfaction measures were likely rooted in an employee's cognitive evaluations of their job, rather than their affective reactions.

Besides the different definitions, the content theory of JS focuses on understanding the needs that influence individuals in the workplace, highlighting the drivers that shape behaviors and decisions (Yadav and Dabhade, 2013). Indeed, job satisfaction arises from employees' perception of how well their jobs fulfill their wants and needs (Lin and Huang, 2020) and the aspects they consider important and valuable (Pushpakumari, 2021).

Different studies have attempted to define and categorize human needs. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory divides human needs into five hierarchical levels, stating that higher-level needs appear only after lower-level needs are satisfied (Maslow, 1943). At the foundation of the hierarchy are psychological needs, which encompass basic living conditions such as the need for food, water and oxygen. They come first in the person search for satisfaction, as all other needs become irrelevant if they remain unmet (Wei and Ma, 2022). Then, progressing up the hierarchy, we have safety needs, which refers to the pursuit of personal safety, employment and economic security. Once these needs are satisfied, individuals seek to satisfy social needs, which involve the desire to gain friendship, emotional support and care, establishing enduring interpersonal connections (Maslow, 1943). Beyond social fulfillment, people aspire to meet esteem needs, which include both self-esteem and external recognition. A sense of self-worth and confidence develops when these needs are satisfied, whereas frustration in this area can lead to feelings of inferiority, weakness, and helplessness. At the top of the hierarchy lies self-actualization need, which refer to the individual's desire to unleash their potential, realizing their ideals and become the person they expect to be (Wei and Ma, 2022). The core concept of the theory is that once an individual has satisfied the needs at a particular stage, they will not be further motivated unless they strive to progress to a higher level (Tan, 2014). The distinction of needs made by Maslow has strong implications for organizations, suggesting that various levels of employee's needs must be addressed to foster a motivated and satisfied workforce.

ERG theory developed by Alderfer extended Maslow hierarchy of needs, re-categorizing the five motivational needs into three categories (Ahmad et al., 2021): existence needs, which includes physiological and physical safety and security; relatedness needs, which involve the need to maintain strong interpersonal interactions and obtain public recognition; growth needs, which refer to self-development and professional improvement desire. Unlike Maslow theory, the ERG theory does not propose that lower-level needs must be fully satisfied before higher-level needs can serve as motivational factors (Tan, 2014).

McClelland's theory of needs suggests three different needs to fulfill to achieve satisfaction, namely need for power, need for achievement and need for affiliation (Tan, 2014). The need for power (nPow) encompasses everything that give people status, power and authority over the others (Baptista et al., 2021). This need leads people to analyze the organizational dynamics through a competitive lens and strive to be perceived as influential and powerful, viewing success as a result of holding significant power in their role (Baptista et al., 2021). The need for achievement (nAch) refers to the desire to stand out and improve the performance. It's a motivational pattern that is characterized by self-confidence, strong initiative and focus on well-defined goals, driving individuals to take moderate risks and seek opportunities for performance feedback (Baptista et al., 2021). Need for affiliation (nAff) is related to the necessity of seeking attentions, creating social interactions and establish cooperative work environments (Ahmad et al., 2021), driving people to be team players in the work environment and engage with many colleagues (Baptista et al., 2021).

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, also known as the Motivation-Hygiene Theory, suggests that job satisfaction is driven by specific factors, while a separate set of factors leads to dissatisfaction, both operating independently within the workplace (Galanakis and Peramarzis, 2022). Motivators are those job factors that cause positive job attitudes as they satisfy the employees' need for self-actualization (Tietjen and Myers, 1998), resulting in higher job satisfaction. This category includes factors such as recognition, achievement, growth opportunities, advancement, responsibility and the work itself (Herzberg et al., 1959). Conversely, hygiene factors refer to the conditions that surround the "doing" of the job and the workplace (Alshmemri et al., 2017). While their presence prevents job dissatisfaction, they do not contribute to increased job satisfaction. Thus, the absence of hygiene factors causes dissatisfaction among employees, but their presence does not lead to satisfaction at work (Herzberg, 1959). Hygiene factors include pay, working conditions, relationships with supervisors, company policies and administration, security and fringe benefits (Herzberg, 1959).

In the current competitive work environment, job satisfaction has emerged as a vital element for organizational success and sustainability. JS directly influences employee's performance by fostering

higher levels of engagement, motivation and productivity, as satisfied employees are more committed and contribute more positively to workplace culture (Rana and Singh, 2024). Moreover, higher JS in organizational context leads to reduced turnover, lower absenteeism and enhanced employee retention, which translate into a huge cost saving for organization in terms by minimizing the resources deployed for training and recruiting (Rana and Singh, 2024). From the employer's perspective, a satisfied workforce contributes positively by improving brand reputation, driving innovation, boosting productivity and organizational effectiveness, as well as proving as a competitive advantage for attracting talents inside organizations (Baxi and Atre, 2024).

Conversely, job dissatisfaction refers to the negative emotions and unfavorable feelings towards the job. Fee Yean et al. (2022) identified three job stressors that result in higher job dissatisfaction at work, namely role overload, role ambiguity and organizational constraints. Role overload refers to the situation where employees have responsibilities that exceed what is possible to perform, causing dissatisfaction. Role ambiguity occurs when employees perceive a sense of uncertainty of what job responsibilities and expectations are, generating frustration. Organizational constraints - such as inadequate internal resources - physically limit employees in performing their task, leads to higher job dissatisfaction among workers. Higher levels of job dissatisfaction trigger the emergence of counterproductive work behavior (CWB), that include any form of behavior that violate organizational norms and have a detrimental effect on the organization well-being, resulting in lower company productivity, damaged employer brand reputation and higher turnover rates (Fee Yean et al., 2022).

2.2. General Overview of Reward Mechanisms

Reward can be defined as the compensation that an employee gets from an organization for their service (Zhou et al., 2009; Dosenovic, 2016). Similarly, they are defined as “*the monetary, non-monetary and psychological payments that an organization provides for its employees in exchange for a bundle of valued work-related behaviours*” (Bratton and Gold, 2007, p. 278). Reward systems have been the main topic of many studies as organizations are willing to know what motivates their employees and what encourages them to put forth their utmost effort at work (Victor and Hoole, 2021). Therefore, rewards are carefully shaped by organizations to influence employees' behavior and attitudes towards their job (Francis et al., 2020; Chiang and Birtch, 2012). A reward system encompasses all the policies and mechanisms that organizations use to manage employee rewards, ensuring alignment with the organization's strategic goals while remaining appealing and cost-efficient (Eerde, 2015).

In the organizational context, managing the reward mechanism is a crucial activity for human resource management (De Gieter and Hofmans, 2015). Rewards boost desirable employee behaviors like performance, commitment (Williams et al., 2006), and engagement (Waqas and Saleem, 2014). Employee performance, which refers to the quantity and quality of work delivered while fulfilling the responsibilities of their role in alignment with established expectations (Mdhlalose, 2023), is an indicator of overall organizational performance, therefore organizations want their employees to perform their tasks properly to meet their goals (Noorazem et al., 2021). Thus, organizations shape their reward mechanism to influence and increase employee performance (Kolluru, 2022; Salah, 2016). Engaged employees value their jobs more and are more likely to help organization succeed and share knowledge with other employees; further, also the degree of employees' engagement is influenced by how rewards are structured (Scott et al., 2010).

Moreover, rewards mechanisms are important in managing the attraction and retention of employees inside organizations (Figuereido et al, 2025). Rewards help retaining key employees who are crucial for the success of the organization, helping them fulfilling their needs, while also providing social status and position of power inside organizations (Terera and Ngirande, 2014). Organizations must handle rewards carefully, as perceived inadequate rewards are a reason for talents to leave organizations (Scott et al., 2012).

Many theories explain the use of rewards and have how reward mechanisms are shaped in organizations. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) developed by Ryan and Deci distinguishes between intrinsic motivation, which refers to engaging in a behavior for the inherent interest or enjoyment of it, and extrinsic motivation, which concerns to behaviors done for other reasons, to attain a separable outcome (Ryan and Deci, 2000). However, these two forms of motivation are not opposed but exist on a continuum (Gagne and Deci, 2005). The continuum starts with amotivation, characterized by the absence of motivation, and progresses through various forms of extrinsic motivation, that reflect increasing levels of internalization. From external regulation, where actions are motivated by rewards or possible punishments, the process moves to integration, i.e., the most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation. In this stage, external goals are fully aligned with one's self concept, resulting in an internal locus of causality. Finally, the continuum culminates in intrinsic motivation, representing the peak of self-determined motivation, characterized by a fully internal locus of causality (Ryan and Deci, 2000). According to SDT theory, intrinsic motivation and internalization of extrinsic motivation are natural processes that thrive when provided with the necessary nutrients (Gagne and Deci,

2005). Three basic psychological needs must be properly fulfilled (Slemp et al., 2021): autonomy, which involves experiencing a sense of control over one's actions; competence, the need to feel effective and capable; and relatedness, the need to experience a sense of belonging and connection with others. Facilitating the full internalization of extrinsic motivation and enhancing employee's intrinsic motivation leads to favorable work outcomes, such as improved performance, especially on tasks requiring cognitive flexibility and conceptual understanding, increased job satisfaction, greater engagement in organizational citizenship behavior (Gagne and Deci, 2005).

Thus, the use of tangible rewards, like money or material prizes, tends to undermine intrinsic motivation, especially when perceived as controlling tools that diminish the sense of autonomy in the employee, whereas rewards such as feedback and recognition can enhance intrinsic motivation if perceived as genuine and supportive of autonomy and competence (Deci et al., 1999). This phenomenon takes the name of crowding-out effect (Frey and Jegen, 2001), and it occurs when individuals feel that monetary/external rewards diminish intrinsic motivation, as they perceive these kinds of rewards as a form of control that undermines their autonomy, reducing their inherent willingness to perform an activity. More specifically, intrinsic motivation crowding out happens when internal locus of causality, that is the meaning associated to a certain behavior aligned with personal values or goals, decreases (Lohmann et al. 2016). Conversely, motivation has also an external locus of causality when it arises from perceived external or internal pressures, such as guilt or desire for a specific outcome.

Crowding out is related to a qualitative shift in motivation, where motivation driven by internal locus is outweighed by motivation derived from external factors. This effect challenges the economic assumption that monetary incentives always boost motivation, as it takes into consideration the balance between extrinsic and intrinsic one, highlighting the need for employers to adjust workplace incentives to avoid negative consequences (Frey and Jegen, 2001). On the other hand, crowding in effect happens when external incentives enhance intrinsic motivation, as they are perceived as supportive rather than controlling (Frey and Jegen, 2001).

Exchange theory offers a broader perspective about the implications of financial and non-financial rewards inside organizations (Chiang and Birtch, 2012). Its core premise posits that individuals and organizations engage in an employment exchange relationship, where both financial and non-financial rewards influence an individual's evaluation of the costs and benefits of the exchange, shaping their perceptions and ultimately guiding behavior.

Financial rewards, grounded in the logic of economic exchange, serve as key drivers of employee performance (Rousseau and Parks, 1993), as employees are motivated to exert effort when they

perceive a clear and mutually beneficial exchange, where their contributions to the organization are reciprocated through financial compensation. This transactional employment relationship is characterized by short-term, monetizable exchanges in which individuals, driven by self-interest, seek to maximize the value they derive from their interaction with the organization (Rousseau and Parks, 1993).

The influence of non-financial rewards, in contrast, draws on the social exchange perspective, where employees who perceive that their needs are being met (e.g., through alternative work arrangements) or that the organization is investing in them (e.g., training and development) are more likely to reciprocate with improved performance (Chiang and Birtch, 2012). Additionally, non-financial rewards often have a broader scope and a longer-term focus in driving performance outcomes (Kalleberg and Rognes, 2000).

From the perspective of agency theory, employers can employ a range of reward mechanisms to influence employees' behavior and align their interests with those of the organization (Eisenhardt, 1989). The agency theory takes into account the relationship between the individual (principal) that gives authority to another (agent) to act in their name, thus the agent's decisions impact the wealth of the principal (Cuevas-Rodríguez et al., 2012). Since it is impossible for the principal to ensure, at no cost, that the agent consistently makes the best decisions on their behalf (Zogning, 2022), agency costs emerge. They can be classified into different categories (Meckling and Jensen, 1976):

- **Monitoring costs:** costs sustained by principal to mitigate the agent's opportunistic behavior. This type of costs often involves implementing mechanisms to oversee the agent's actions and ensure compliance with principal's targets.
- **Incentive costs:** associated with the implementation of incentive systems aimed at guiding the agent's behavior.
- **Motivation costs:** these costs are incurred by the agent to gain the principal's trust, representing the efforts put to signal reliability and commitment.
- **Residual loss:** opportunity cost or utility loss experienced by the principal due to a divergence of interests between the principal and the agent.

Agency costs primarily result from conflicts of interest between principal and agent and the phenomenon of information asymmetry (Linder and Foss, 2013), namely the difference of information between the two parties (Zogning, 2022), that creates a negative externality, reducing the total value generated within the relationship and diminishing the principal's profit (Foss and Stea). A key contribution of agency theory lies in its insights into how principals can structure incentive

mechanisms and implement monitoring systems to minimize agency costs (Linder and Foss, 2013). To address this, the principal should specify a reward structure, linking the agent's compensation to observable outcomes of their effort and other sources of information that serve as indicators of the agent's performance, such as the performance of peers (Foss and Stea, 2014).

Rewards can be systematically classified based on various dimensions, each reflecting a distinct aspect of their purpose and application (Peters, 2011):

- **Form of reward:** rewards may be financial (tangible) or non-financial (intangible).
- **Time period:** rewards can be granted for past performance or as an incentive for expected future performance.
- **Primary recipient:** rewards may be allocated to individuals, teams, or for the overall performance of the organization.
- **Criteria for reward:** rewards can recognize various aspects such as results, appropriate behavior, demonstrated skills, or meeting job requirements, among others.

Given the diverse range of rewards available, organizations often face the challenge of determining the most appropriate options to implement (Peters, 2011) and strive to identify an optimal combination of rewards that aligns with key considerations, such as their competitive business position and strategic objectives (Zingheim and Schuster, 2000).

In this context, the concept of total reward (TR) is relevant. Total reward theory takes into account all the tools available that the employer may exploit to motivate the employees (Zhou et al., 2009) and which compose the whole employee's reward package (Fernandes, 1998). This concept encompasses everything an employee perceives as valuable from their employment relationship, offering a broader perspective on everything an organization can provide to its employees and everything employees can commit to their company (Zhou et al., 2009). The total reward package encapsulates a combination of elements like base and variable pay, recognition, celebration and benefits (Patricia and Jay, 2000) which form a complete reward mechanism that can be strategically handled by organizations to improve efficiency, satisfaction and performance at work (Zhou et al., 2009). Zingheim and Schuster (2000) distinguished four different components of TR: total, pay, individual growth, compelling future and positive workplace. This highlights how employees look for more than just financial rewards from organizations, giving relevance to rewards related to personal improvement and the work environment as well. Similarly, Armstrong (2007) defines relational rewards as the intangible benefits linked to learning, development, and the work environment, which are essential components of the broader total rewards framework.

Other studies have stressed the dichotomous nature of reward system. For instance, Dosenovic (2016) distinguished material/financial rewards from non-material/non-financial rewards: the former category refers to direct and indirect forms of monetary compensation such as basic pay, performance-based pay bonuses related to achievement of goals and profit-sharing rewards, while the latter includes respect, appraisal, chance for development. Similarly, Chiang and Birtch (2012) addressed the double dimension of rewards systems, emphasizing the different motivational effect that different mechanisms can have. Tools like salary and benefits reward efficiency and promote routine, risk-averse behavior in employees. In contrast, non-financial mechanisms like recognition boost self-esteem and nurture intrinsic motivation (Chiang and Birtch, 2012). While financial rewards have traditionally been the cornerstone of organizational incentive systems, growing pressure to manage and reduce costs has led to the increased prominence and widespread adoption of non-financial rewards (Wah, 2000). Thus, in the organizations, a framework that clearly distinct between financial and non-financial (non-monetary) rewards can be set up (Victor and Hoole, 2021).

2.3. Financial Rewards

Financial rewards are defined as monetary incentives provided to employees in recognition of their performance and contributions to an organization. These rewards can take various forms, including salaries, bonuses, commissions, and profit-sharing arrangements, and are designed to motivate employees to achieve specific performance goals aligned with organizational objectives (Ongadi, 2020).

Salary is the money remuneration that an employee receives for their contribution in achieving organizational goals, and it is paid on a regular basis that can be either annually, quarterly, monthly, weekly or daily (Ricardo, 2022). Organizations must properly craft salaries to ensure both internal equity -related to the fact that employees who perform similar tasks receive an equal reward-, and external equity -that refers to employees being compensated comparably to those in similar organizations (Alamsyah et al., 2024). Fair compensation boosts employees' retention and satisfaction (Karami and Alikhani, 2020), as well as work motivation and organizational commitment (Alamsyah et al., 2024). Thus, salaries should be designed in a fair and competitive way to award employees on the bases of the work they perform to contribute to organizational goals (Alamsyah et al., 2024).

A monetary compensation that is only determined by salary plans and does not vary according to performance or results achieved, is labelled as fixed pay (Madhani, 2010), or base pay, referring to a fixed amount of money employees receive to perform their job tasks (Bomm and Kaimann, 2022). Variable pay, instead, refers to a compensation mechanism that varies according to the level of

performance or results achieved, aiming at aligning the interests of the employees with those of the employer and creating a culture where workers are more motivated and caring about organizational effectiveness (Madhani 2010).

In this context, the concept of Pay-for-Performance (PFP) is relevant. PFP plans are pay mechanisms implemented by organizations linked to performance (Durham and Bartol, 2012). The core premise behind PFP plans is that compensation tied closely to individual, team or organizational performance has a stronger influence on employee motivation. PFP strategies include both individual-based rewards, such as merit pay and lump-sum bonuses, and/or group-based rewards, in the form of gain sharing, profit sharing and stock options (Park, 2018).

Merit pay, commonly considered the most common PFP mechanism adopted by organizations (Gerhart et al., 2009; Park and Sturman, 2012), is a permanent increase in the base salary of the employee based on its individual performance (Park, 2018). The increase is determined by an employee's performance evaluation, typically conducted by its supervisor, ensuring that distinctions in achievements are accurately recognized and meaningfully linked to salary growth both within a given year and over time (Gerhart et al., 2009). Research shows that merit pay can effectively motivate employees to boost their performance, providing a direct financial reward linked to specific targets (Nyberg et al., 2016). However, effective implementation of merit pay is crucial, as employees' perceptions of fairness are fundamental for its success (Salimaki and Jamsen, 2010), as when merit pay mechanisms are believed to be based on fair and equitable criteria, their effectiveness is higher. Conversely, poorly managed merit pay strategies can lead to dissatisfaction and lower support for merit pay mechanisms (Brown, 2001).

Lump-sum bonuses are one-time cash payments given to employees that do not increase their base salaries (Sturman and Short, 2006). They are contingent cash payments, awarded at the organization's discretion, serving as performance-based rewards at individual, team or organizational levels (Milkovich and Newman, 1999). They differ from other compensation components, such as raises and benefits. Contrarily from salary increases, that take the form of merit-based adjustments or across-the-board raises, lump-sum bonuses do not result in a permanent modification of an employee's base salary. Additionally, these bonuses are distinct from employee benefits, which constitute indirect forms of compensation rather than direct monetary payments (Milkovich & Newman, 1999).

Profit-sharing is defined as any reward system where employee pay fluctuates based on company profit in a given period (Kruse, 1992). Profit-sharing plans distribute a predetermined portion of a firm's earnings to employees when the organization generates profits. The structure of these programs

varies: while some operate under formalized guidelines that link employee payments to company profits through a predefined formula, sometimes paired with a discretionary component, others function as entirely discretionary programs, in which firms determine the bonus amount at the end of each financial period (Kruse and Blasi, 2010). Research shows that profit-sharing mechanisms encourage long-term commitment among employees, aligning their interests with company's objectives, and boost productivity, while reducing absenteeism and turnover (Jana and Petera, 2013), offering workers a financial stake in the company success (Wilson et al., 1990).

Differently from profit sharing mechanisms, gain-sharing programs provide financial incentives based on the performance of a single business unit rather than the whole company, evaluating productivity improvements or cost-saving targets (Jana and Petera, 2013). Gain-sharing programs enable a selected group of employees to be rewarded based on their direct contributions, not depending on the organization's overall financial performance or the achievements of other departments (Kruse and Blasi, 2010). Thus, compared to profit sharing, gain-sharing is more transparent and directly observable by employees, as it establishes a direct connection between efforts and rewards received (Jana and Petera, 2013).

Stock options are also commonly used to reward employees inside organizations. They consist of agreements that provide employees with the right to purchase company shares at a predetermined exercise price within a certain timeframe (Lin, 2024). Stock options plans give the opportunity to benefit from increase in the company's stock price. Indeed, the rationale behind this reward mechanism is to align employees' financial interests with those of shareholders, encouraging both to work towards the organization success (Cappelli et al., 2020). In this way, stock options serve as a direct financial incentive: since the value of stock options depends on the company's stock price, employees are expected to work harder, improve productivity, and make strategic decisions that contribute to the firm's growth, particularly within employees who hold a large number of stock options (Cappelli et al., 2020). Moreover, stock options are associated to another effect for employees, rooted in the social exchange theory. They create a psychological contract between employees and employers, where the former feel valued and trusted by the latter, triggering increased commitment and loyalty by employees, regardless of whether the stock price increase or not (Cappelli et al., 2020). This effect becomes stronger right after employees realize a profit from the exercise of the options, resulting in increased job performance in the following period. Research shows that stock options serve not only to motivate employees but also to retain them, as companies strategically design these options by adjusting vesting schedules and maturity restrictions to retain skilled employees and encourage long-term commitment, aligning employee behavior with company goals (Lin, 2024).

2.4. Non-financial rewards

While many individuals consider financial rewards as the most effective tools to motivate employees, some employers implement specific non-financial incentives to enhance job satisfaction and boost motivation (Haider et al., 2015). Providing employees with high salaries alone is not sufficient to satisfy them (Schlechter et al. 2015). Similarly, while salary increases and cash bonuses may initially boost employee motivation and satisfaction, their effects are less enduring compared to the influence of non-financial rewards (Whitaker, 2010).

Non-financial rewards consist of benefits that motivate individuals without direct monetary compensation, such as increased responsibilities, career advancement opportunities, recognition and praise (Musaazi, 2002). Unlike financial rewards, which primarily stimulates extrinsic motivation, non-monetary incentives significantly contribute to enhancing intrinsic motivation (Thompson, 2002), fostering a highly satisfied workforce, as they provide job autonomy, job involvement and job significance to the employees (Haider et al., 2015). These types of rewards help satisfying the inner-self and psychological needs of employees, enhancing their overall work experience rather solely addressing materialistic needs (Neochoritis, 2018). Non-financial rewards have different motivational characteristics. Training and professional development contribute to the enhancement of human capital by facilitating the acquisition of knowledge and skills (Mak & Akhtar, 2003), while recognition plays a crucial role in boosting employees' self-confidence and sense of competence (Chiang & Birtch, 2012). Thus, they play a crucial role in both attracting potential employees, standing out as top employer, and increasing the actual employees' engagement (Haider et al., 2015), as well as improving their commitment and performance (Brewster and Maryrhofer, 2012).

Non-financial rewards can vary greatly in terms of type and scope. For instance, Work-life balance is defined as *“the extent to which an individual is engaged in and equally satisfied with his or her work role and family role consisting of three components of work-family balance: time balance - equal time devoted to work and family, involvement balance - equal involvement in work and family, and satisfaction balance - equal satisfaction with work and family”* (Greenhaus et al., 2013, p. 513). It refers to the perspective that working life is compatible with personal life (Thompson, 2014), along with the perception that successfully integrating work and family life fosters personal growth in alignment with an individual's life priorities (Kalliath and Brough, 2008), promoting psychological, emotional, and cognitive stability among employees. Work-life balance policies refer to voluntarily implemented organizational initiatives and family-friendly practices aimed at accommodating the needs of both employees and employers, helping employees to effectively manage their personal and professional responsibilities while simultaneously supporting organizational objectives (Neochoritis,

2018). The perception of work-life balance inside organizations positively affects job satisfaction and autonomy, while the absence of it causes lack of engagement, increased absenteeism and turnover rates, as well as lower productivity among employees (Chimote and Srivastava, 2013). Implementing policies that promote work-life balance enhances employee engagement, improves performance, and fosters greater commitment (Bhalerao, 2013). In contrast, a misalignment between work and family priorities can lead to increased stress levels (Probert, 2005).

Feedback can be defined as *“the degree to which carrying out the work activities required by the job results in the individual obtaining direct and clear information about the effectiveness of his or her performance”* (Hackman and Oldham, 1976, p. 258), allowing employees to understand how effectively they are performing. Its importance inside organizations is rooted into the Job Characteristics Theory developed by Hackman and Oldham in 1976 to explain how job design influences people attitudes at work. They identified five core job characteristics, namely skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and job feedback, which triggers three different psychological states (experienced meaningfulness of the work, experienced responsibility for the outcomes of the work, and knowledge of the actual results of the work activities), that in turn boost work motivation, work performance and work satisfaction and lower job withdrawal. Feedback is directly associated with the knowledge of the actual results of the job. Job feedback could derive directly from the activities themselves involved in the job, by directly looking at the outcomes (Krasman, 2013). However, Hackman and Oldham (1980) distinguished two additional types of feedback: feedback from agents, which refers to the extent to which employees receive clear information about job performance from supervisors or colleagues, and feedback from others relates to how much a job needs interactions with people such as external clients, organizational members and fellow employees, as part of work activities. Performance feedback plays a key role in shaping performance of employees (Jawahar, 2006) and has a significant impact on both job related and organizational attitudes (Ilgen et al., 1981), making it essential not only for employees but also for employers for the achievement of their targets. Moreover, research shows that employees who are satisfied with feedback provided at work show improved job performance, reports higher levels of job satisfaction and are less likely to consider leaving the organization where they work (Jawahar, 2006).

Recognition is the formal or informal appreciation of an individual's or team's actions and achievements, which align with organizational goals and values, often exceeding standard expectations (Akafo and Boateng, 2015). Gostick and Elton (2007) define it as the act of praising or acknowledging an employee's achievements, highlighting that even small gestures can be relevant

and hold significant values for workers. Recognition can come in different forms, including verbal or written praise, symbolic gestures by managers or public praise, given in diverse contexts, such as task completion, birthdays or service anniversaries, and may include letters, postcards, workplace displays of employee achievements, or name postings in common areas (Tessema et al., 2013), requiring little planning or expense (Darling et al., 1997). Darling et al. (1997) assert that praise for a job well done is among the most effective methods to enhance employee morale, suggesting that consistent recognition and rewards are simple yet powerful tools for maintaining employee satisfaction and productivity. Providing recognition inside organizations enable the fulfillment of the need of appreciation of workers, boosting job satisfaction, productivity and motivation (Harrison, 2013). Whether as individuals or team members, employees desire recognition for their achievements, efforts, and dedication, reinforcing their sense of purpose and engagement. Employee recognition consists of two moments: firstly, noticing and identifying moments worthy of praise, and then actively expressing appreciation, whether through verbal praise, written acknowledgment, or symbolic gestures (Harrison, 2013). Research shows that providing employees effective recognition leads to higher motivation and productivity, ultimately resulting in better organizational performance (Akafo and Boateng, 2015). The positive effect of recognition on individual employee performance can be explained through the theory of reciprocity. Specifically, employees perceive recognition as a form of social and psychological reward that fulfills their esteem needs, fostering a sense of obligation to reciprocate through increased effort and commitment to their work (Akafo and Boateng, 2015). The rationale behind this behavior is that, according to Blau (1964), individuals are intrinsically interested in maintaining an equilibrium between inputs and outputs in social interactions, striving to avoid deficit or surplus in their exchanges. Recognition has been shown to boost productivity and job satisfaction (Gostick and Elton, 2007), as well as leading to lower absenteeism and turnover (Nelson, 2005) and encouraging employees to exert additional effort in their roles (Robbins & Judge, 2008). Moreover, employees benefit significantly from positive reinforcement and recognition, whether from peers or management, motivating them and fostering confidence and job satisfaction, while also cultivating loyalty and commitment (Tessema et al., 2013).

Another non-financial reward commonly implemented among organizations is promotion. Promotion, also referred to as career advancement, can be defined as “the chance to be promoted or elevated to a higher rank or to a position of greater personal dignity or importance, coupled with higher salaries” (Tam et al., 2009, p. 261), helping employees achieving their personal career plan (Ratnasari et al., 2019). Promotions are usually used to reward the exceptional performance of highly skilled employees, fostering a stronger sense of belonging and job security towards the employer (Neochoritis, 2018). Career advancement opportunities are considered one of the most effective

rewards for retaining employees (Pregnolato et al., 2017). Employees are more likely to remain in organizations that actively invest in their development and integrate them into the company's long-term vision, as a well-structured developmental plan not only demonstrates the organization's commitment to its workforce but also enhances employee engagement and loyalty (Haider et al., 2015). Conversely, the lack of such initiatives may increase frustration among the workforce, causing employees to explore alternative employment opportunities that offer greater prospects for career advancement and professional fulfillment (Mercer and Reilly, 2006).

2.5. The effect of rewards on Job Satisfaction

Several studies have examined the effects of financial and non-financial rewards in the organizational context, highlighting their role in shaping employees' motivation (Akafo and Boateng, 2015) and satisfaction (Yapa, 2002; Lawler and Porter, 2008), stating that, rather than a single type of reward, it's the combination of the different mechanisms that significantly affect satisfaction at work (Wong et al., 2007; Bessell et al., 2015). Both intrinsic, non-monetary mechanisms such as recognition, performance feedback and regular praise and financial incentives - including merit pay, profit sharing and gain sharing have been proved to have a significant positive effect on the satisfaction of employees (Sankalpana and Jayasekara, 2017; Ozutku, 2012). Similarly, Wasiman (2020) highlighted that a well-structured rewards policy serves as a motivational tool, helping to prevent employees from experiencing job dissatisfaction. Additionally, research shows that organization's reward systems have a positive effect on job satisfaction, particularly when the reward mechanisms are aligned with the organization's promises (Siregar et al., 2023).

Research indicates that while financial incentives can enhance employee motivation in the short term, non-financial ones provide a longer-term motivating effect (Bambarang and Priyankara, 2018). Providing employees with high salaries alone is not sufficient to guarantee motivation and satisfaction (Thompson, 2014), and while pay raises and cash bonuses may initially boost motivation and satisfaction, their impact is often short-lived compared to the lasting influence of non-financial incentives (Whitaker, 2009). Thus, organizations must find a proper balance between financial and non-financial incentives to maintain a motivated workforce.

2.5.1. Financial Rewards and Job Satisfaction

Financial rewards, including salaries, bonuses, benefits, and other forms of compensation, are critical drivers of employee job satisfaction (Riasat et al., 2016). Monetary incentives have a significant influence on JS, as when employees are given salaries and bonuses, they feel higher satisfaction that in turn impact positively on their performance (Zaraket and Saber, 2017). This increase in satisfaction

may be through the fulfillment of needs or financial obligations that enhance their performance in exchange for the benefits provided (Edwards et al., 2006).

Arokiasamy et al. (2013) highlighted the positive effect of mechanisms such as pay and other financial benefits on JS; according to Ali and Akram (2012), financial rewards such as salary increments and bonuses have a significant positive effect on employee motivation and satisfaction, especially in competitive industries like pharmaceuticals. Furthermore, in their study on a sample of Pakistan electric supply industry workers, Zia et al. (2010) also emphasized the importance of extrinsic rewards like salaries and benefits in ensuring high levels of job satisfaction.

McCausland et al. (2005) suggested a positive impact of bonus and profit-sharing schemes on average work satisfaction among workers in Great Britain. Similarly, Pouliakas (2008) focuses on the effect of distributing bonuses and profit-sharing payments to workers, and his findings indicated that while relatively smaller incentives negatively impacted job satisfaction, large bonuses or profit-sharing rewards have a significant positive effect on JS, supporting a "V-shaped" incentive pattern and reinforcing the notion that employers seeking to motivate their workforce should compensate it adequately.

Furthermore, in his Two-Factor theory of elements that affect people's attitude towards work, Herzberg (1959) categorizes salary as a hygiene factor, suggesting that while salary does not directly increase job satisfaction, its absence can lead to dissatisfaction. Herzberg's theory is considered one of the most significant theories in job satisfaction field (Alshmemri et al., 2017; Dion, 2006) and has been widely supported by subsequent studies, especially in the healthcare and nursing sector (Timmreck, 2001; Snodgrass and Jones, 2012). The research conducted by Yaseen (2013) in the healthcare sector of Punjab reinforced this statement by declaring that inadequate financial compensation significantly contributes to dissatisfaction among doctors.

Bambarandage and Priyankara (2018) support the positive role of financial rewards in job satisfaction, especially in banking sectors, where salary increments and bonuses are crucial for maintaining high employee morale. Similarly, Sarwar and Abugre (2013) argued that competitive compensation significantly enhances job satisfaction in the service industry by reducing turnover and increasing employee loyalty, while Demeke (2017) reinforced this by showing that financial rewards, including salaries and benefits, were the most significant determinants of job satisfaction among employees in his empirical research. Consistent with these findings, Bustamam et Abdullah (2014) observed that, among the rewards mechanisms, financial rewards provided the greatest impact on JS.

Erbasi and Arat (2024) studied the impact of financial and non-financial rewards in the food chain premises, and despite acknowledging that both have a positive effect on job satisfaction, ultimately stated that financial incentives exert a stronger influence on JS compared to non-financial rewards. Similarly, Khalid et al. (2024) considered that pay is the primary factor of satisfaction among workers, highlighting a significant positive relationship between pay level and job satisfaction.

Based on these findings, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H1: Financial rewards exert a positive impact on job satisfaction.

2.5.2. Non-Financial Rewards and Job Satisfaction

Non-financial incentives play a crucial role in enhancing organizational effectiveness by fostering a highly satisfied and motivated workforce, providing employees with greater autonomy in their roles, increased recognition for their contributions, and higher levels of job involvement and significance, all of which contribute to overall job satisfaction (Haider et al., 2015).

Non-financial rewards, such as recognition, career development opportunities, work-life balance, and job autonomy (Haider et al., 2015), play a crucial role in fostering deeper and more sustained job satisfaction (Nel et al., 2004; Hayati and Caniango, 2012). According to Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, non-financial rewards are classified as motivators that lead to long-term satisfaction. Intrinsic rewards like recognition and responsibility are key to employees' feelings of personal accomplishment. Brewster and Mayrhofer (2012) also highlighted the role of non-financial rewards in enhancing job satisfaction, observing their contribution to employee engagement and organizational commitment. Haider et al. (2015) pointed out that while financial rewards are essential, they are often complemented by non-financial rewards for long-term satisfaction, especially sectors where intrinsic motivation can be equally important.

Research by Danish and Usman (2010) underscored the significant positive correlation between recognition and employee motivation and satisfaction, indicating that non-financial rewards can lead to engagement and commitment among workers. Tausif (2012) examined the relationship between non-financial rewards and job satisfaction in Pakistan's educational sector, finding that job enrichment and autonomy were particularly effective in enhancing satisfaction. These findings were reinforced by other studies which analyzed how implementation of non-financial rewards mechanisms lead to higher satisfaction of employees in organizations (Kerketta and Chauhan, 2023; Bustamam et Abdullah, 2014; Kalleberg, 1977).

Haider et al. (2015) further explored the role of non-financial rewards, such as decision-making autonomy, in enhancing job satisfaction, noting that such rewards are increasingly seen as essential

for employee retention and performance. This aligns with the findings of Tippet and Kluvers (2009), who demonstrated that non-profit organizations in Australia rely heavily on intrinsic rewards to keep employees motivated despite lower financial compensation. Additionally, the work of Sarwar and Abugre (2013) in the service sector offered evidence on the fact that non-financial rewards element like recognition for the work done boost JS among employees.

Research shows that promotional opportunities are strongly related to JS (Khalid et al., 2024). Supporting this view, Ellickson and Logsdon (2001), in their study on the determinants of job satisfaction, found that access to career advancement opportunities has a significant and powerful impact on employees' overall satisfaction. This finding aligns with the research conducted by Mustapha and Zakaria (2013), which also identified a strong positive relationship between promotion opportunities and JS. Their study suggests that organizations should prioritize career advancement pathways as a key incentive to fulfill employees' needs and improve talent retention.

In his research about feedback inside organizations, Jawahar (2006) suggested that employees' satisfaction with feedback provided is positively linked to both job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Likewise, in their study on the determinants of JS among healthcare workers, Huang et al., (2022) found that performance feedback has a significant impact on job satisfaction. Similarly, Momotani and Otsuka (2019) examined the effect of a comprehensive feedback environment between supervisors and subordinates on JS. Their findings suggest that providing constructive and supportive feedback elicits a positive response from subordinates, helping them developing a more favorable attitude towards both the organization and their role and enhancing their job satisfaction.

Also recognition is believed to enrich employees' energies towards accomplishment of organizational goals and objectives and providing workers with formal or informal mechanisms of recognition enhance their level of job satisfaction (Imran et al., 2014), while not providing employees with adequate recognition will result in dissatisfaction (Armstrong 2005). Chikungwa and Chamisa (2013) furtherly stated that providing employees with recognition of their performance and achievement boost their level of satisfaction and motivation. Similarly, research by Colin-Chevalier et al. (2022) on the psychosocial factors influencing job satisfaction revealed that recognition - provided by clients, colleagues or management- was the most influential factor in determining job satisfaction for both managers and employees. Zin et al. (2022), in their study about determinants of job satisfaction in non-profit organizations, observed that recognition, among the others, has the strongest correlation with JS, demonstrating that employees tend be more satisfied when they feel acknowledged for their work. This aligns with the findings of Tessema et al. (2013), who argued that employees experience satisfaction not only from with monetary rewards like salary and benefits, but also from non-financial

incentives such as recognition, stressing the need for organizations to actively recognize employees' effort to enhance their overall JS.

Based on the reviewed literature, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H2: Non-financial rewards produce a significant positive impact on job satisfaction.

2.6. Perceived Organizational Politics

Many studies define organizations as political arenas where people with different values, attitudes and beliefs often act to enhance their position at the expense of their colleagues (Paarima et al., 2024). In this context, in the organizations people tend adopt political behaviors to reach individual benefits and gain advantages from the organization environment (Landells and Albrecht, 2019). Frost and Hayes (1977, p. 8) defined political behavior as *“the activities of organizational members... when they use resources to enhance or protect their share of an exchange... in ways which would be resisted, or ways in which the impact would be resisted, if recognized by the other party(ies) to the exchange”*. Similarly, Gandz and Murray (1980, p. 248) referred to organizational politics as *“a subjective state in which organizational members perceive themselves or others as intentionally seeking selfish ends in an organizational context when such ends are opposed to those of others”*. Drory and Romm (1990) selected three distinctive elements that define organizational politics: the selfish concept of achieving goals no matter the means employed, the use of informal methods to exert influence considered political, regardless of the expected outcomes and the adoption of methods to achieve desired results based on the needs of the situation. Thus, organizational politics (OP) assume a negative connotation, defined as behaviors not consistent with organizational norms (Mintzberg, 1983) that enhances people furthering their own self-interests (Atta & Khan, 2016) and that can undermine the reach of company's collective objectives (Landells and Albrecht, 2019). Additionally, Butt et al. (2013) stated that organizational politics are informal, unauthorized, and often behind-the-scenes actions aimed at shaping perceptions, controlling an organization, gaining power, or achieving specific objectives. Kapoutsis (2016, p. 5) labeled this negative connotation of OP defining them as the *“dark side of the force”*.

Gandz and Murray (1980) classified two categories of scholars that examined workplace politics. The first defines it as a form of behavior related with the exercise of power and influence. Within this category, two subgroups emerge: one focused on conflict about allocation of resources, while the other encompasses conflicts over policy decisions beyond resource distribution (Gandz and Murray, 1980). The second category conceptualizes workplace politics in terms of self-serving behavior. This

category is also divided into two perspectives: one characterizes political behavior as self-serving and detrimental to the organization's overall targets, while the other sees it as a selfish approach that conflicts with the interest of other employees within the organization (Gandz and Murray, 1980).

Organizational politics, however, are difficult to define in an objective way as everyone can perceive them differently based on their experience (Atta & Khan, 2016; Kacmar and Carlson, 1997). Specifically, people's opinion about political events and behaviors depends on whether the fact affected them positively or negatively (Kacmar and Carlson, 1997). Consequently, workplace politics is best understood as a subjective experience rather than as an objective phenomenon (Gandz and Murray, 1980). Therefore, how employees react to those organizational phenomena is based on their subjective perceptions, so what it's worth for organizations is the concept of Perceived Organizational Politics (POP) (Ferris and Kacmar, 1992). Ferris and Kacmar (1992, p. 93) define POP as "*the factors that contribute to employees perceiving a work environment as political in nature and the consequences of forming such perceptions on individual attitudes and behavior*". Labrague et al. (2016) stressed the selfish aspect of POP, claiming that through these kind of behaviors people tend to ignore the well-being of others at work.

Ferris et al. (1989) proposed a framework of perceived organizational politics - summarized by Ferris and Kacmar (1992) - to understand and highlight the factors that influence POP and its subsequent effects on organizational outcomes. Influencing factors are divided into three categories: organizational influences, job/work environment influences and personal influences.

Organizational influences consist of four different factors: centralization, formalization, hierarchical level and span of control. Research indicates that formalization -defined by formal rules and procedures- is negatively related to perception of organizational politics, as it minimizes the level of uncertainty and ambiguity in the work environment (Ferris and Kacmar, 1992). Conversely, high levels of centralization, where decision-making power is concentrated among a strict group of individuals, lead to higher level of perceived politics, as employees perceive power as unequally distributed (Ferris et al., 1989). The role of hierarchical levels in influencing POP remains ambiguous. Some studies posit that higher levels in the organizations are associated to higher potential for perceiving political behavior (Ferris et al., 1989), while others stated that lower-level employees perceive more politics due to their limited control over the workplace dynamics and decision-making processes (Gandz and Murray, 1980). Furthermore, span of control —defined as the number of employees reporting to a single supervisor—is positively related to POP. When supervisors have to deal with a larger number of employees, individualized attention decreases, fostering uncertainty and enhancing the possibility that employees perceive political behavior (Ferris and Kacmar, 1992).

Job/work environment factors include job autonomy, job variety, feedback, advancement opportunities and interaction with others (coworkers and supervisors). Research indicates that job autonomy, job variety and feedback are negatively related to POP, as they reduce the level of ambiguity and uncertainty inside organizations, similar to the effect of formalization (Ferris and Kacmar, 1992). Likewise, the presence of advancement opportunity mitigates the perceptions of workplace politics. Conversely, the interaction with others is believed to boost perception of political behavior, as employees become more exposed to opportunistic behavior performed by coworkers or supervisors within the organization (Ferris et al., 1989).

Personal influences encompass demographic characteristics (gender and age) and personality characteristics (Machiavellianism and self-monitoring) of the perceiver. Machiavellianism is a personality trait associated to cynicism, manipulative behavior used to influence others to achieve self-related interests and willingness to deviate from ethical standards for personal gain (Dahling et al., 2012). Self-monitoring is related to how people monitor and regulated their behaviors based on the situation: high self-monitors are able to modify their behavior to fit specific situations, while low self-monitors are less responsive to social contexts, acting more consistently with their internal attitudes (Wilmot et al., 2016). Ferris et al. (1989) suggested that women and older employees view their work environments as more political compared to other categories. Similarly, both high Machiavellianism and self-monitoring employees have higher perceptions of political behavior at work.

Regarding the outcomes triggered by POP, Ferris et al. (1989) categorized them into job involvement, job anxiety, job satisfaction and withdrawal behaviors, such as absenteeism and turnover. Kacmar and Baron (1999) reviewed multiple studies, indicating a positive relationship between POP and turnover intentions and job anxiety, while stating that POP negatively influenced job satisfaction and job involvement. Regarding withdrawal behaviors, leaving organizations can be the first potential response of an employee who perceive politics at work (Ferris and Kacmar, 1992). For those who remain, increased absenteeism, diminished job involvement, and decreased overall job satisfaction are common responses to a politically charged work environment.

Perception of Politics Scale (POPS) was firstly developed by Ferris and Kacmar in 1991 to measure political behavior in organizations. The first model of this scale included twelve items loaded to three different dimensions: “General political behavior”, “Go along to get ahead”, “Pay and promotion”.

The first factor reflects generic individuals' self-serving actions aimed at achieving personal goals (Salam, 2016). Employees tend to assume these behaviors especially in contexts that lack of rules and regulations, as well as in organizations where resources are scarce, and people get into competition and try to impose their own rules (Kacmar and Carlson, 1997). In this context, individuals who control

essential resources become primary targets of political influence strategies, and the perceived value associated with those resources intensify the competition and enhance engagement in political activities to secure them (Kacmar and Carlson, 1997). Moreover, this situation of ambiguity impacts decision-making process, resulting in actions guided by personal interpretations of data and can appear political to those not involved into the process (Kacmar and Carlson, 1997).

“Go along to get ahead” category is strictly associated with conflict, as political behavior poses a threat for others self-interest, potentially triggering disputes. According to Drory and Romm (1990), conflict is a fundamental underlying element of organizational politics. However, people can choose to avoid conflict and refrain from resisting others’ influence attempts. While this may initially appear to be a non-political action, if such behavior is deliberately employed to protect or advance one's self-interest, it qualifies as political behavior (Kacmar and Carlson, 1997), as the absence of action refers to behaviors where individuals remain silent or passive as a strategy to advance their position. Indeed, within organizations people can get positive outcomes by not interfering with other individual’s politics, gaining acceptance in the “in-group” that experience higher outcomes (Kacmar and Carlson, 1997).

With regards to “Pay and promotion” category, organizations can unintentionally foster political behavior by rewarding self-interested actions through HR policies that prioritize perceived performance over actual merit (Kacmar and Carlson, 1997) and penalizing those who do not engage in such behaviors. This encourages employees to engage in political behavior to gain rewards and promotions, perpetuating a culture of organizational politics (Salam, 2016). Moreover, support for political behavior provided by organizations may encourage individuals who have previously refrained from engaging in such actions to adopt political strategies in the future (Kacmar and Carlson, 1997). Specifically, employees that perceive unfair allocation of rewards, particularly when those who engage in political behavior obtain higher advantages, are more likely to engage in political behaviors over time (Ferris et al., 1989).

Employee perceptions of organizational politics have been shown to play a crucial role in shaping attitudes towards reward systems, particularly in contexts where merit pay is used. The subjective process of assessing employee performance, specifically when these evaluations are related to choices of compensation and promotion, can lead to biased outcomes. When employees perceive those biases and unfair evaluations, they interpret them as manifestations of internal politics and violation of organizational fairness (Salimaki and Jamsen, 2010). In their research, Salimaki and Jamsen (2010) found out that when employees perceive a great degree of political influence in pay-related decisions, they were more likely to view the compensation system as ineffective in achieving its intended goals.

Likewise, perceptions of favoritism in performance appraisal were associated with lower effectiveness of the pay system. These findings underscore the need to account for the organizational political environment when assessing how reward system are perceived, aligning with social exchange theory, which posits that trust and motivation in the workplace are built through fair and mutually beneficial interactions (Salimaki and Jamsen, 2010). Therefore, when reward processes are affected by politics, their beneficial impact is severely undermined.

2.7. Perceived Organizational Politics and Job Satisfaction

The effect of POP on Job Satisfaction has been widely analyzed in literature. Ferris et al. (1989) stated that perceived organizational politics have a negative relationship with JS, stressing that high levels of POP felt by employees at work lead to lower satisfaction with their jobs, and the other way around. This statement was supported by Kacmar and Baron (1999), that conducted an analysis of the several outcomes of organizational politics and identified eleven studies which explored a negative effect of POP on JS (Ferris and Kacmar, 1992; Nye and Witt, 1993; Parker et al., 1995). Similarly, Poon (2013), analyzing the situational antecedents and outcomes of organizational politics perceptions, found that POP has a significant negative effect on job satisfaction, suggesting the need of managerial intervention to mitigate the prevalence of such perceptions among employees. This finding was also supported by the study of Harris et al. (2007), which examined the relationship between organizational politics and workplace attitudes, confirming that POP is negatively and significantly associated to job satisfaction. Likewise, the research conducted by Bozeman et al. (2001) further supported the hypothesis that POP negatively impacts Job Satisfaction, with this effect being amplified among individuals with high levels of job self-efficacy, highlighting that employees who are more confident in their professional capabilities may be more sensitive to workplace dynamics inside organizations.

Katrinli et al. (2010) analyzed the impact of POP as a moderating factor on JS, more specifically moderating the effects of leader-member exchange quality on job satisfaction, contributing to the body of research emphasizing the detrimental impact of organizational politics on job satisfaction. The results showed that under conditions of high perceptions of organizational politics, the positive relationship between LMX and job satisfaction will become weaker, indicating a negative moderating effect of POP on JS.

Some studies focus deeply on the effect of the three specific categories as firstly designed by Ferris and Kacmar in 1991: General Political Behavior (GPV), Go Along to Get Ahead (GAGA), Pay and Promotion Policies (PPP). Luqman et al. (2015) highlighted a significant negative effect of GPV and

GAGA on JS, while reporting no statistical significance regarding the contribution of PPP. Differently, Salam (2016) found out in their study that it was GAGA the only category of POP which registered no significant effect on job satisfaction, while observing negative effects for PPP and GPV. Labrague et al. (2016), in their research on the influence of POP on nurses' job outcomes, highlighted a negative impact of POP on JS and stated that, among the three categories, PPP is the one that scores an higher level among the participants. Chen et al. (2017) found that organizational politics perception has a negative effect on job satisfaction, specifically concerning the GPV and the GAGA category. Akanbi and Ofoegbu (2013), in their study about the influence of POP on job satisfaction, stated that Pay and Promotion policies and JS have a significant negative correlation. Their findings further indicates that a 1% increase in PPP results in an estimated 38% fall in JS, highlighting the negative impact of perceived workplace politics on satisfaction among workers.

Vigoda (2000) proposed a framework to investigate the effects of POPS inside public sector organizations. Specifically, he identified four different job attitudes that are directly affected by politics: job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job involvement and job anxiety. When an organization is permeated by a strong political environment, employees are more likely to feel a sense of unfairness and to develop disappointment towards how they are treated, negatively affecting job satisfaction. In fact, the empirical research confirmed the hypothesis that perception of organizational politics is negatively related to (JS) and organizational commitment.

The extent to which perceptions of organizational politics lead to job dissatisfaction depends on whether these politics are seen as harmful or negative. Consequently, individuals who view politics within the organization as threatening are likely to feel generally dissatisfied with their job in a highly political environment (Ferris et al. 1989). Drory (1993), investigated deeply the differences on impact of organizational politics on employees at different hierarchical levels. While higher-status employees, who typically have more power and influence, are relatively unaffected by workplace politics, lower-status employees, that lack of resources and authority to face political behaviors, suffer frustration and disappointment. As a result, they are more likely to develop negative attitudes toward their job and the organization, leading to reduced job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Drory, 1993).

From a more psychological approach, perceived organizational politics is considered as a stressor, more specifically an hindrance stressor (Abbas et al., 2012; Chang et al., 2009) which is defined as a *“work-related demands or circumstance that tend to constrain or interfere with an individual's work achievement, which do not tend to be associated with potential gains of the individual”* (Boswell et al., 2004, p. 166). These kinds of stressors, which include politics as well as aspect like role ambiguity

and conflict (Boswell et al., 2004), have been shown to negatively affect attitudes like job satisfaction and motivation (LePine et al., 2005), leading to high levels of employee strain (Pearsall et al., 2009) and resulting in diminished motivation and engagement (Dewe et al., 1993). In their experimental research, Abbas et al. (2012) proved the negative effect of POP on job satisfaction, but taking into account the moderating role of psychological capabilities of individuals. Basically, it was demonstrated that employees with high psychological capital, characterized by confidence, resilience and perseverance, are better equipped to handle challenges at work such as organizational politics, therefore they are less negatively affected by negative consequences of POP such as reduced JS (Abbas et al., 2012). Similarly, Javed et al. (2014) demonstrated that the negative relationship between POP and JS is moderated by core self-evaluation (CSE), in the sense that high levels of CSE make the negative effect weaker. The work of Hassan et al. (2017) focused on the relationship between POP and JS but considering the psychological element of personality traits as moderator, namely agreeableness, openness, extraversion and conscientiousness. The result showed that the negative effect of politics on employees' satisfaction is amplified by high levels of extraversion (Hassan et al., 2017).

In conclusion, there is evidence of the relationship between perception of organization politics and job satisfaction in organizations. Even if this impact can be moderated by factors such as psychological resilience (Abbas et al., 2012), core self-evaluation (Javed et al., 2014), and personality traits (Hassan et al., 2017), which can lessen the dissatisfaction caused by POP, political behaviors consistently have a negative effect on job satisfaction, proving that a highly political work environment can undermine employee satisfaction and commitment, ultimately affecting organizational climate and objectives (Vigoda, 2000).

In light of the reviewed literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: Perceived Organizational Politics (POP) negatively moderates the relationship between financial rewards and job satisfaction. The positive impact of financial rewards on job satisfaction decreases when employees perceive a high level of organizational politics.

H4: Perceived Organizational Politics (POP) negatively moderates the relationship between non-financial rewards and job satisfaction. The positive impact of non-financial rewards on job satisfaction decreases when employees perceive a high level of organizational politics.

3. Experimental Research

3.1. Methodological Approach

3.1.1. *Participants*

A total of 392 individuals initially accessed and responded to the online survey. However, only 236 responses were retained for the final analysis. Participants were excluded based on two main criteria: failure to meet the inclusion requirement assessed through a screening question (“Are you currently employed?”), and incomplete submission of the questionnaire. Participants who responded “No” to the screening question were automatically directed to the end of the survey and thus excluded from the final sample.

The final sample included 236 participants who fully completed the questionnaire. The average age of the population was 28.4 years old, ranging from a minimum of 18 years old to a maximum of 61 years old. In terms of gender distribution, the sample included 173 female participants (73.3%), 61 male participants (25.85%) and 2 individuals who identified as non-binary/third gender (0.85%).

For what concerns family status, 122 participants (51.69%) reported being in a relationship or cohabiting, 93 (39.4%) were single, 17 (7.2%) were married, and 4 (1.7%) were separated or divorced. A vast majority ($n = 218$; 92.37%) reported having no children, while 18 participants (7.62%) indicated they had children.

Regarding the educational background, the majority of the participants ($n = 154$; 65.25%) held a Master’s degree, 41 (17.37%) had completed a PhD, 27 (11.44%) had a Bachelor's degree, while 14 (5.93%) held a high school diploma. Annual income distribution ranged from below 15.000 euros ($n = 33$; 13.98%) to above 100.000 euros ($n = 10$; 4.24%), with the majority of participants falling into within the 25.000-35.000 range ($n = 91$; 38.56%), followed by 15.000-25.000 ($n = 49$; 20.76%), 35.000-50.000 ($n = 37$; 15.68%) and 50.000-100.000 ($n = 16$; 6.78%).

In terms of current job position, the majority of participants reported working as employees ($n = 128$; 54%), followed by junior manager positions ($n = 50$; 21.09%), internships ($n = 31$; 13.08%), self-employed roles ($n = 11$; 4.66%), senior management positions ($n = 11$; 4.66%), managing director ($n = 1$; 0.42%) and partnership roles ($n = 1$; 0.42%). Additionally, 3 participants (1.27%) indicated an alternative position not listed among the predefined categories.

When examining the sector of employment, most respondents worked in the tertiary sector ($n = 212$; 89.83%). The secondary sector accounted for 6.78% ($n = 16$), while only 0.85% ($n = 2$) worked in the primary sector and 0.42% ($n = 1$) in the military. An additional 2.12% ($n = 5$) were employed in sectors not listed among the main categories.

As for the organizational size, nearly half of the participants worked in multinational corporations ($n = 109$; 46.19%). Large companies accounted for 14.83% of the final sample ($n = 35$), while medium-sized businesses for 13.98% ($n = 33$), followed by small companies ($n = 26$; 11.02%) and public administration ($n = 16$; 6.78%). A minority worked in microenterprises ($n = 15$; 6.36%) or other organizational settings ($n = 2$; 0.85%).

3.1.2. Procedure

The data for this study were collected through a survey conducted in Italy, developed and administered using the online platform “Qualtrics XM”.

Respondents accessed the questionnaire by using an anonymous link generated by the platform, which was delivered mainly through two social media applications: WhatsApp and LinkedIn.

The survey comprised a total of 73 questions, including the screening question, 9 questions related to demographic information, and 63 items focused on the variables of interest.

The survey can be divided into three sections: (1) **Introduction, Screening and Informed Consent:** The survey started with a brief explanation of the academic purpose of the study. Then, the screening question (“Are you currently employed?”) was presented. Participants who answered “No” to the screening question were automatically redirected to the end of the survey. Moreover, informed consent was obtained, with participants explicitly agreeing to take part in the study, in accordance with the declaration of Helsinki and the APA ethical standards for the treatment of human sample. Participants were also informed of their right to discontinue participation and withdraw their consent at any time. (2) **Control Variables:** this section included 9 questions where participants were asked to give information about age, gender, marital status, parental status, educational level, income, current job position, industry sector, and company size. (3) **Variables of Interest:** the final section of the survey consisted of 63 items measured using a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Given that the questionnaire was conducted in Italy, all the original questions were carefully translated in Italian to facilitate accurate comprehension among respondents. The first 30 questions regard job satisfaction, serving as the dependent variable. The items derived from the Job Satisfaction Scale developed by Özpehlivan and Acar (2016), using all the six subscales, each consisting of 5 items (i.e. Satisfaction on “job and working conditions”; Satisfaction on “management skills”; Satisfaction on “co-workers”; Satisfaction on “external environment”; Satisfaction on “promotion”; Satisfaction on “pay”). The following 18 items attain to financial rewards and non-financial rewards, the independent variables. The items were adopted from the Financial Rewards

Scale (8 items) and Non-Financial Rewards Scale (10 items) developed by Bustamam et al. (2014) to assess the impact of reward management on job satisfaction. The last 15 items measure perceptions of organizational politics, the moderating variable. The items derived from the 15-items Perceptions of Organizational Politics Scale (POPS) developed and validated by Kacmar and Carlson (1997), who refined and augmented the existing 12-items scale firstly developed by Kacmar and Ferris (1991). All 15 items, covering three subscales, were included in this study (“General Political Behavior”, 2 items; “Go Along to Get Ahead”, 7 items; “Pay and Promotion”, 6 items).

3.1.3. Analysis

The present study investigated the effect of financial and non-financial rewards on job satisfaction, with a particular focus on the moderating role of perceived organizational politics (POP) in these relationships. Specifically, two moderation models (PROCESS macro for SPSS; Hayes, 2015; IBM SPSS, 2021) were tested: the first included financial rewards, and the second non-financial rewards as independent variable; both models included job satisfaction as independent variable, and POP as moderator. POP was expected to weaken the positive effects of both types of rewards on job satisfaction (Figure 1).

Control variables such as gender, age, marital status, parental status, educational level, income, current job position, industry sector, and company size were also included in the analysis.

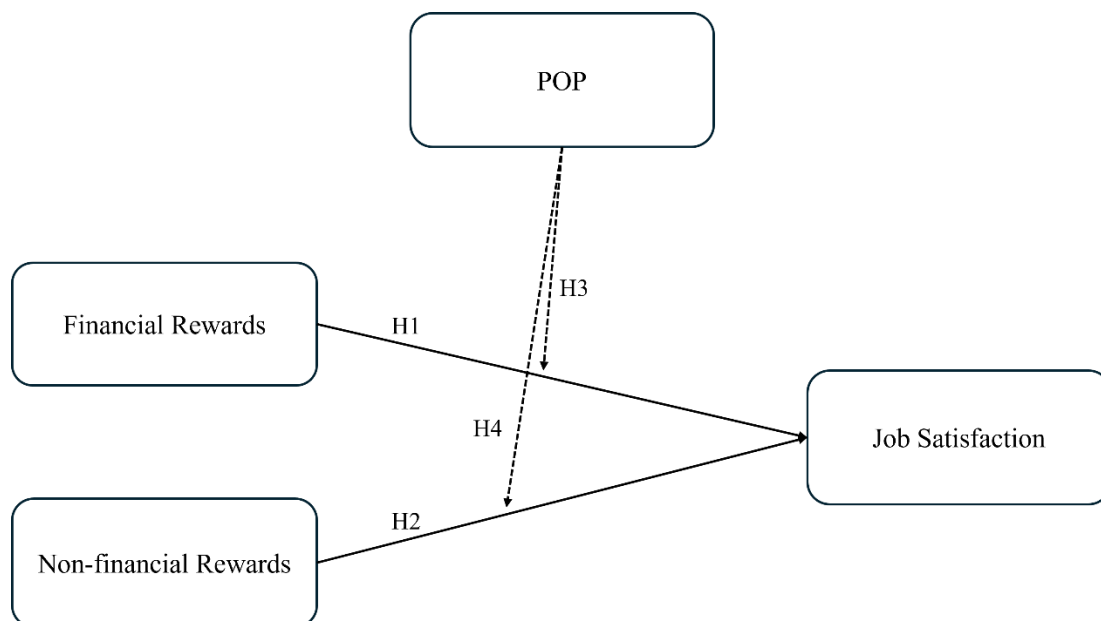


Figure 1: Hypotheses 1,2,3,4

3.2. Experimental results

3.2.1 *Data analysis and model specification*

The data collected through the survey were exported to SPSS for analysis. Before conducting the main analyses, all scale and subscale scores were z-transformed to obtain standardized variables that were used to build the models. Reliability tests were performed to assess the validity of all instruments used. As shown in Table 1, all four scales demonstrate high internal consistency, as Cronbach's Alpha coefficients are above the commonly accepted threshold of 0.7.

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of the measurement scales

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha
Job Satisfaction	0.931
Financial Rewards	0.744
Non-Financial Rewards	0.929
Perceived Organizational Politics	0.789

To test hypotheses 1 and 2, which state that financial and non-financial rewards have a significant positive impact on job satisfaction, a multiple linear regression analysis was performed. Financial and non-financial rewards were entered as independent variables, while job satisfaction was specified as the dependent variable. The model was integrated with a set of covariates that include gender, age, marital status, parental status, educational level, income, current job position, industry sector, and company size.

To examine hypotheses 3 and 4, which posit that perceived organizational politics (POP) negatively moderates the relationship between financial rewards and job satisfaction (H3) and non-financial rewards and job satisfaction (H4), a moderation analysis was conducted using the PROCESS Macro on SPSS (Hayes, 2015; IBM SPSS, 2021). In the models, financial rewards and non-financial rewards were used as the independent variables, job satisfaction as the dependent variable, and perceived organizational politics as the moderator. The same set of covariates used to test hypotheses 1 and 2 was included in the models.

3.2.2 *Results*

H1: Financial rewards exert a positive impact on job satisfaction.

H2: Non-financial rewards produce a significant positive impact on job satisfaction.

The results of the analysis indicate that the overall regression model is globally significant ($F[11,224] = 31.45$, $p < 0.001$). Regression analysis shows that both Financial Rewards ($\beta = 0.331$, $p < 0.001$) and Non-financial Rewards ($\beta = 0.502$, $p < 0.001$) exert a significant positive influence on Job Satisfaction, thus supporting hypotheses 1 and 2.

Among the covariates, only Income has a marginally significant effect on Job Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.091$, $p < 0.1$), while the others do not demonstrate statistically significant relationships. Table 2 provides a comprehensive summary of the regression results.

Table 2: Results of the multiple linear regression conducted using Job Satisfaction (z-scored) as dependent variable and Financial Rewards (z-scored) and Non-financial Rewards (z-scored) as independent variables, including covariates

	β	t	Significance
Financial Rewards	0.331	5.926	0.000
Non-financial Rewards	0.502	9.339	0.000
Gender	-0.045	-1.017	0.310
Age	0.043	0.688	0.492
Marital Status	-0.026	-0.505	0.614
Parental Status	-0.043	-0.717	0.474
Educational Level	-0.024	-0.545	0.586
Income	0.091	1.773	0.078
Current Job Position	0.020	0.450	0.653
Industry Sector	-0.053	-1.234	0.218
Company Size	0.069	1.566	0.119

Figure 2 visually shows the relationship between Financial and Non-financial Rewards and Job Satisfaction by plotting the z-scores of the independent variables against the z-scores of the dependent variable. The steeper slope of the trendline for non-financial rewards suggests that they exert a stronger impact on job satisfaction compared to financial rewards, reinforcing the results of the multiple regression analysis.



Figure 2: Scatterplot with trendlines illustrating the relationship between Financial and Non-Financial Rewards and Job Satisfaction, all in standardized values.

H3: Perceived Organizational Politics (POP) negatively moderates the relationship between financial rewards and job satisfaction. The positive impact of financial rewards on job satisfaction decreases when employees perceive a high level of organizational politics.

The overall model is significant ($F[12,223] = 19.42, p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.51$). The results show a positive and significant effect of Financial Rewards ($\beta = 0.57, p < 0.001$) on Job Satisfaction, while POP has a negative direct effect ($\beta = -0.25, p < 0.001$) on Job Satisfaction.

However, there is no significant moderating effect of POP in the relationship between Financial Rewards and Job Satisfaction, as the interaction term Financial Rewards x POP is not statistically significant. Therefore, hypothesis 3 is not supported.

Regarding the covariates, only Company Size demonstrates a marginally significant positive effect on Job Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.07, p < 0.1$). See Table 3 for a detailed summary of the results.

Table 3: Results of the moderation analysis conducted using Job Satisfaction (z-scored) as dependent variable, Financial Rewards (z-scored) as independent variable and POP (z-scored) as moderator variable, including covariates

	β	SE	t	Significance	LLCI	ULCI
Financial Rewards	0.57	0.05	10.82	0.00	0.46	0.67
POP	-0.25	0.05	-5.07	0.00	-0.35	-0.15
Financial Rewards x POP	-0.01	0.04	-0.18	0.86	-0.09	0.08
Gender	-0.11	0.11	-1.03	0.30	-0.33	0.10
Age	0.02	0.01	1.60	0.11	0.00	0.04
Marital Status	-0.02	0.09	-0.22	0.83	-0.19	0.15
Parental Status	0.13	0.25	0.53	0.60	-0.36	0.63
Educational Level	-0.04	0.07	-0.63	0.53	-0.18	0.09
Income	-0.01	0.04	-0.16	0.87	-0.09	0.08
Current Job Position	0.02	0.03	0.60	0.55	-0.05	0.09
Industry Sector	-0.08	0.07	-1.15	0.25	-0.23	0.06
Company Size	0.07	0.04	1.85	0.07	0.00	0.14

Figure 3 visually presents the relationship between Financial Rewards and Job Satisfaction across three different levels of POP (low, medium and high). The parallel slopes of the lines show that the impact of Financial Rewards on Job Satisfaction does not depend on the POP levels, reinforcing the conclusion that they exert independent effects on the dependent variable.

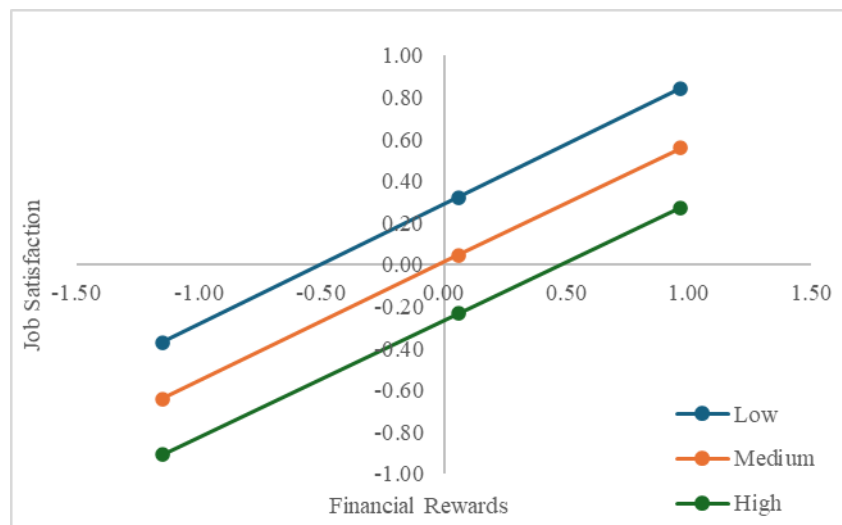


Figure 3: Moderation plot showing the relationship between Financial Rewards and Job Satisfaction at low, medium and high levels of Perceived Organizational Politics (POP)

H4: Perceived Organizational Politics (POP) negatively moderates the relationship between non-financial rewards and job satisfaction. The positive impact of non-financial rewards on job satisfaction decreases when employees perceive a high level of organizational politics.

The model is statistically significant ($F[12,223] = 24.56, p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.57$). Non-financial Rewards has a positive and significant effect ($\beta = 0.63, p < 0.001$) on Job Satisfaction, whereas POP exhibits a negative direct significant effect ($\beta = -0.17, p < 0.001$) on Job Satisfaction.

The interaction between Non-financial Rewards and POP is not significant, indicating that POP does not moderate the relationship between Non-financial Rewards and Job Satisfaction. Thus, hypothesis 4 is not supported.

Among the covariates, Company Size shows a marginally significant positive influence on Job Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.07, p < 0.1$), while Income has a significant positive effect on Job Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.15, p < 0.001$). Table 4 provides a comprehensive review of the results.

Table 4: Results of the moderation analysis conducted using Job Satisfaction (z-scored) as dependent variable, Non-financial Rewards (z-scored) as independent variable and POP (z-scored) as moderator variable, including covariates

	β	SE	t	Significance	LLCI	ULCI
Non-financial Rewards	0.63	0.05	12.60	0.00	0.53	0.73
POP	-0.17	0.05	-3.40	0.00	-0.26	-0.07
Non-financial Rewards x POP	-0.02	0.05	-0.49	0.63	-0.11	0.07
Gender	-0.14	0.10	-1.33	0.19	-0.34	0.07
Age	0.00	0.01	-0.26	0.79	-0.02	0.02
Marital Status	-0.03	0.08	-0.38	0.70	-0.19	0.13
Parental Status	-0.14	0.24	-0.60	0.55	-0.61	0.32
Educational Level	-0.09	0.06	-1.42	0.16	-0.22	0.04
Income	0.15	0.04	3.78	0.00	0.07	0.23
Current Job Position	0.02	0.03	0.51	0.61	-0.05	0.08
Industry Sector	-0.06	0.07	-0.82	0.42	-0.19	0.08
Company Size	0.07	0.03	2.24	0.03	0.01	0.14

Figure 4 illustrates the relationship between Non-financial Rewards and Job Satisfaction at low, medium and high levels of POP. Although the lines appear to have slightly different slopes, the results confirm no significant interaction between non-financial rewards and POP, suggesting that they independently influence Job Satisfaction.

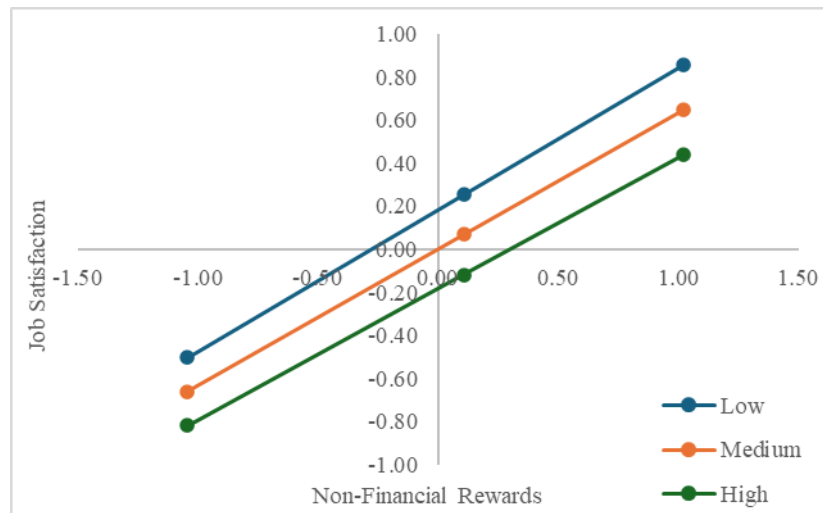


Figure 4: Moderation plot showing the relationship between Non-financial Rewards and Job Satisfaction at low, medium and high levels of Perceived Organizational Politics (POP)

4. Discussion

4.1. General discussion

The findings of this study provide empirical support for the hypothesis that both financial and non-financial rewards exert a significant positive influence on job satisfaction. These results are consistent with the existing literature, which emphasizes that employee satisfaction is affected by a combination of tangible and intangible reward mechanisms (Wong et al., 2007).

Monetary incentives such as salaries and bonuses increase employees' motivation and satisfaction (Ali and Akram, 2012), which in turn positively impact performance (Zaraket and Saber, 2017), proving as a central tool for reward management inside organizations.

Non-financial reward -including feedback and recognition- also play a crucial role in fostering job satisfaction among employees (Jawahar, 2006; Chikungwa and Chamisa, 2013), demonstrating that a supportive environment, where employees' efforts are valued and recognized, improves their attitude towards their role and increases job satisfaction. Non-monetary rewards also promote higher levels of job engagement and organizational commitment (Brewster and Mayrhofer, 2012), improving retention and performance (Haider et al., 2015).

Notably, the results of the study show that non-financial rewards have a greater effect on job satisfaction than financial incentives. This switch from traditional form of compensation towards relational and intrinsic factors of motivation offers valuable insights in the organizational context and reflects a transformation in employee expectations.

The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to this trend, as employees found themselves dealing with more responsibilities, extended hours (Klaas, 2024) and technological strain, including technostress (Chan et al., 2023), as well as increased psychological and emotional work demands. In this context, recognition of employees' efforts became a key determinant of satisfaction and morale (Klaas, 2024). Post-pandemic, this trend has persisted, with employees valuing non-monetary incentives as more meaningful tools to enhance work motivation than financial compensation (Vesal et al., 2024). Particularly, for many employees, the pandemic triggered a shift in their attitudes towards work, which is viewed less as a support to fulfilling life and more as a mandatory burden to face, specifically among young workers (Arciniega et al., 2023). This attitudinal change requires leaders to prioritize recognition, support and communication with employees and establish non-monetary compensation mechanisms that promote career advancement paths, a fair performance evaluation system and consistent recognition to motivate them (Jin, 2024).

4.2. Theoretical and managerial implications

Theoretically, the results of the study contribute to organizational compensation systems literature by reinforcing the importance of adopting an integrated approach that combines both financial and non-financial incentives to boost job satisfaction. The stronger influence of non-financial mechanisms aligns with important motivational theories like Herzberg Two-factor Theory, which stresses the importance of motivator factors -like recognition- in enhancing an individual's job satisfaction by satisfying the need of self-actualization (Herzberg, 1959). Moreover, the prominence of non-financial incentives resonates with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which recognizes the pivotal role of instruments that boost intrinsic motivation by fulfilling employees' physiological need of autonomy, competence and relatedness.

Regarding perceptions of organizational politics, even if the study showed no significant moderator effect of POP in the rewards-satisfaction relationship, the significant negative direct effect of POP on job satisfaction confirms its detrimental role among organizations and suggests that future research should analyze POP as independent variable to more effectively investigate its influence on job satisfaction or motivation.

From a managerial perspective, the results reveal important insights in the organizational context. Considering that both financial rewards and non-financial rewards significantly contribute to employees' job satisfaction, organizations should implement comprehensive reward strategies that include both types of compensation. However, given the stronger effect of non-financial incentives, organizations should prioritize managerial practices that enhance relational and motivational engagement. In the post-pandemic era, employees increasingly reassess their priorities at work and seek meaningful recognition from their supervisors, rather than solely looking for salary increases and bonuses. Managers should therefore adapt to this change by adopting leadership styles that support and strengthen their bonds with the employees. Transformational leadership skills, such as the ability to guide employees to deal with uncertainty, adapt to disruptive change and make decisions in situations of ambiguity (Claus, 2021), become essential. Furthermore, managers should be able to embrace a relationship-oriented leadership approach, showing empathy for employees and acknowledging the effort they put at work (Arciniega et al., 2023). Relational leadership emphasizes the importance of dialogue, trust, mutual respect and the fundamental role of everyday interactions in the organizational life (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011). Adopting this leadership style means not only finding a way to manage employees and their performance, but also creating a work environment where employees feel valued and where recognition, as well as authentic feedback, becomes embedded in the core practices of the organization. By integrating these leadership styles into their

practices, managers create an ongoing, relationship-based approach that meets modern employees' increasing need for connection and recognition of their work. Cultivating a culture of recognition inside organizations significantly enhances employee engagement, making individuals more committed and proactive, and ultimately leads to improved organizational performance and productivity, as employees are more motivated to commit when their efforts are acknowledged (Ramya and Vanithamani), increasing also job satisfaction and employee morale.

As a result, managers should prioritize recognition as a key motivational tool for employees. To do this effectively, adequate training should be provided to managers to enable them to deliver meaningful feedback and authentic recognition. These training programs should include best practices for providing sincere recognition to employees. Evidence suggests that such trainings improve managerial recognition behaviors performed by managers and positively affects organizational performance (Scherbaum et al., 2021).

Regarding POP, while the study reveals that these perceptions do not significantly moderate the link between rewards and job satisfaction, their direct negative impact on JS emphasizes that they can have detrimental effects on the overall work environment. To mitigate these effects, managers should focus on fostering an organizational culture based on trust, fairness and transparent communication to minimize political behaviors that can alter the equilibrium of the work environment and negatively affect job satisfaction.

4.3. Limitations

This study has some limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings.

Firstly, the cross-sectional nature of the study does not account for change in responses over time, meaning that the results could be different if the study were replicated at another time.

Secondly, the sample is mainly composed of people who work in Italy, with a relatively young average age of approximately 28 years old. Specifically, given that the survey was distributed mainly using social media, the sample is skewed toward younger and digitally engaged individuals. Consequently, there could be some limitations in generalizing and scaling the findings to a more heterogeneous population that includes different age groups and nationalities. Moreover, cultural differences may affect how employees perceive rewards, political behavior and job satisfaction, significantly influencing the relationships explored in this study.

Thirdly, the study relies on self-reported data, so participants' answers may be altered by their personal experiences and traits, creating subjectivity. Furthermore, the presence of cognitive biases in individuals' response processes can affect the objectivity of the data collected.

Conclusion

This research provides valuable insights into the relationship between rewards, perceptions of political behavior and job satisfaction. The findings suggest how financial and non-financial rewards play a pivotal role in enhancing the satisfaction of employees within organizations. One of the key contributions of this study is the greater effect of non-financial rewards on satisfaction, compared to financial incentives. This aspect highlights the post-pandemic shift in employees' expectations, with an increasing importance placed on recognition and appraisal rather than monetary incentives. Perceptions of organizational politics, despite not moderating the relationship between rewards and job satisfaction, have been found to have a direct and negative effect on job satisfaction, suggesting the need to minimize political behavior to foster a supportive organizational climate and promote a satisfied work environment.

These findings have crucial implications for organizational practice. They support a comprehensive approach to reward management that encompasses both financial and non-financial rewards, with particular emphasis on non-financial incentives, which help create strong relational bonds between managers and employees, enhancing overall satisfaction. For this purpose, organizations should invest in training managers to deliver recognition of employees' effort, authentic feedback and effective performance appraisal.

Furthermore, the negative effect exerted by perceptions of organizational politics on job satisfaction highlights the importance for managers to cultivate an organizational climate based on trust and transparent communication to keep a satisfied workforce.

Overall, the study enhances the understanding of the role of rewards as drivers of job satisfaction and the influence of perceptions of political behavior in shaping a satisfied workforce, offering valuable theoretical and managerial implications and indicating potential directions for further academic research in this field.

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